Blind for Three Hours

By Adolfo Briceno

The Winston-Salem Mayor’s Council for Persons with Disabilities, in partnership with The Adaptables and Senior Services, hosted Barrier Awareness Day on June 1, 2018 to raise awareness about the difficulties that people with disabilities endure in their everyday lives. About 100 people from the community took part in this hands-on, simulated activities. Some were put in wheelchairs and others, like the author of this article, were blindfolded and given a cane to experience mobility issues or blindness, respectively.

As part of the activity, the blindness group was taken to Miller Park in Downtown Winston-Salem. All the individuals who were blindfolded were given a cane and a crash course on how to use it. The general guidelines included placing the canes close to our waists and using it to scan the floor with a slight side-to-side hand movement to identify obstacles on our paths. We were also given a Guardian Angel, a volunteer just like the rest of us, who would be guiding us with their voices and to make sure that we avoided serious injuries.

The challenges for the participants who were blindfolded started right away. Just trying to get out of the Senior Services building using only the cane and the instructions gently given to us by the Guardian Angel, who in the author’s case was Cynthia Braun, was demanding, to say the least. The leader of the group, an actual blind individual, even took the time to joke with the participants by telling them to look for a red truck, which of course we could not see because of the veil over our eyes.

The difficulties at Miller Park were numerous for a blind individual who had never used a cane. Simply trying to get to the park from the bus was a trying ordeal because of the different surfaces one had to manage. Being on the playground was also interesting because we were taken to a game, designed for blind individuals, in which you push a big button so that it will make a flashing sound. You are supposed to chase this sound by pushing other buttons from the same game until you have exhausted all the sounds and flashing lights. Children in the park were having a blast with this game.

To go to the part of the park designed for non-disabled individuals was also interesting because we had to go through a wooden hanging bridge that would move and swing as you stepped on it. Without the guidance from the Guardian Angel, we would have never made it to the other side.

At the end of the trip, the suggestions we heard from the actual blind individuals in the group was that the hanging bridge could be a hazard for blind people. They also shared that the park needs braille signs to direct them to the restrooms and other important areas.

Latin-X

By Adolfo Briceno

In recent years, the term Latinx has come to the fore as a more inclusive one to refer to the Hispanic community in general.

The idea behind the X is to shed the gender from the word so as to avoid talking about latinos or latinas and include with this new word all those whose sexual identity is neither masculine nor feminine.
According to the article, “Are you Latinx? As usage grows, word draws approval, criticism,” published by NBC News Latino in September, 2016, it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of the word. And although apparently it has been used in Spanish speaking countries, the noun most likely originated in the United States around 2014 in academic circles related to the LGBTQIA community.

The book, “An examination of Latinx populations Across the United States,” by Antonio Pastrana Jr. suggested that the term, most likely, came into place to create a safe space for these populations. “Because of the stresses related to multiple minority statuses, activists have worked diligently to create safe spaces,” the book said.

The aforementioned article, “Are you Latinx,” stated that neither the Oxford English Dictionary, nor Merriam-Webster’s have definitions for the word, although they are tracking it to see if the usage becomes more widespread.

That is precisely the question: Will the word gain momentum in the community so that it becomes a widespread and generally-accepted way to substitute the monikers now in use like Latino, Latina or Hispanic? The mentioned article quotes Gilbert Guerra, a student from Swarthmore College, as saying that this an issue the ordinary Hispanic does not care about. “This is more like something coming from the top down. Besides, if you want to make Spanish gender neutral, the X is not a practical way to go about it,” he said.

Others, like Hector Luis Alamo, who has written for the Website “Latino Rebels,” are worried that those who have chosen not to use the term have been called insensitive by some activists. But some people are already suggesting proper ways to use the term. In “Latinx, a Brief Handbook,” by Arlene Gamio Cuervo, from the Princeton University LGBT Center, she suggests that instead of saying “los niños están en en el cuarto (the children are in the room)” you say “Lxs niñxs están en el cuarto,” substituting either the “a” or the “o” that denote gender in Spanish, with the “x.”

Only time will tell if Latinx becomes widespread and accepted. In the meantime, as the community changes, there will be efforts to capture these changes by modifying the language used to describe them.

**How to Detect Leaks**

*By Kathryn Mobley*

Many Winston-Salem/Forsyth County residents have contacted Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Utilities regarding what they can do to lower a high water bill.

A high water bill usually means you have a leak. The location of the leak will determine who is responsible. If the leak is between the water meter box and your home, then the homeowner is responsible for all repairs.

**Bill Adjustment Policy:**
There is a bill adjustment policy to help residents.

*The customer is responsible to stop the water loss.
*The customer is responsible to make arrangements to repair the fixture/device causing the water loss.
*When repairs are completed, the customer must provide a copy of the plumber’s bill or a statement of materials purchased in association with the repair.
*A utilities agent will verify repairs and coordinate an appropriate bill adjustment.

A bill associated with a concealed leak:
*The billing for the three (3) highest billing periods shall be adjusted to the average water charge—based on the previous 12 months of consumption or 1,200 cubic feet if the previous usage does not exist.
*The resident will be charged for 50% of the water used in excess of the normal usage

A bill associated with a leaking fixture:
*The billing for the three (3) highest billing periods will be adjusted to consist of an average bill.
*The resident will be charged for 50% of the excess water and sewer above what is normally billed during a three (3) month period.

**Bill Adjustment Policy Exceptions:**
*Leaks in an irrigation system or sprinkler lines/heads.
*Leaks at a location where multiple units are serviced by a master meter, such as an apartment building.